

In brief

SARS whistleblower wins

award: Dr Jiang Yanyong has been awarded the 2004 Ramon Magsaysay award for public service in recognition of his bravery in speaking out about the true extent of the outbreak of severe acute respiratory syndrome in China in 2003. Conceived by John D Rockefeller III, the awards are an Asian version of the Nobel prizes. The Beijing doctor was taken into custody for expressing opinions about the 4 June 1989 military crackdown on student protests in Tiananmen Square but was recently released (*BMJ* 31 July, p 248).

Medical schools get funding

boost: Eight of the newest UK medical schools will receive £1.5m (\$2.8m; €2.2m) each to set up state of the art research facilities and attract world-class researchers, Lord Warner, England's health minister, has announced. "This extra funding will mean that the NHS's future doctors can play their part in developing new treatments for tomorrow's patients," he said.

Drug company to make its trial results public

Eli Lilly, the company that makes the antidepressant fluoxetine (Prozac), is to disclose through a publicly available registry the results of all clinical trials that it sponsors of its marketed products. It is envisaged that the registry will include all clinical trials (phases I to IV) of the company's marketed products conducted anywhere in the world.

Atkins diet comes under

review by NICE: The National Institute for Clinical Excellence will be evaluating the Atkins diet and its effectiveness, among other low carbohydrate diets and an evaluation of the diet industry as a whole. The inquiry comes after a House of Commons Health Committee report in May 2004 on obesity and hopes to give guidance on the best strategies for weight loss and management.

Southall is barred for three years from child protection work

Owen Dyer *London*

A leading paediatrician, Professor David Southall, was last week barred by the General Medical Council from undertaking child protection work for three years. The GMC found him guilty of professional misconduct after he accused a father of murdering his children without having collected any evidence.

Professor Southall had accused Stephen Clark of murdering his two sons in April 2000, on the basis of an interview with Mr Clark that he watched on the Channel 4 documentary *Dispatches*. In the interview Mr Clark described a nosebleed that his son Christopher had had in a London hotel in 1996. Christopher died at home nine days after the hotel incident.

At the time of the *Dispatches* broadcast, Mr Clark's wife, Sally, was in prison, wrongly convicted of the murder of Christopher and his younger brother Harry. Mr Clark was then campaigning on her behalf and appeared on *Dispatches* in an effort to plead her innocence. Mrs Clark was later freed on appeal (*BMJ* 2003;326:304).

When Professor Southall saw Mr Clark's description of the hotel incident, however, he concluded that the father must have tried to smother Christopher just before the bleeding. He contacted the child protection team and later wrote a report claiming that Mr Clark's guilt was "certain or near-certain."

In June 2004, the GMC found that Professor Southall had abused his position of trust. Two days of further hearings last week were devoted largely to testimonials from Professor Southall's supporters, including over 80 doctors and paediatricians, who argued that his 30 year "pioneering" career should be taken into consideration. But the professional con-

duct committee's chairman, Denis McDavitt, noted that Professor Southall had not "seen fit to withdraw these allegations or to offer any apology."

Professor Southall was previously suspended from his post and forbidden by his employer, North Staffordshire Hospital NHS Trust, from undertaking child protection work at the time of his accusation against Mr Clark, although he was later reinstated (*BMJ* 2002;325:1054). That suspension was in connection with an investigation into his work on continuous negative extrathoracic pressure ventilation. A GMC hearing cleared him in March of failure to obtain informed consent in this work.

Professor Southall's GMC travails are not yet over, as he faces a third hearing in January 2005 involving complaints from seven other parents.

A spokesman for North Staffordshire NHS Trust said that Professor Southall will keep his job. The Royal College of Paediatrics and Child Health declined to comment. □

Victims of gas leak in Bhopal seek redress on compensation

Sanjay Kumar *New Delhi*

Thousands of compensation claims relating to one of the world's biggest industrial disasters, at the Union Carbide factory in Bhopal in 1984, are being taken to India's Supreme Court for revision next week.

The move comes in the wake of a Supreme Court order of 19 July, which asked the government to distribute the remaining 15 billion rupees (£176m; \$325m; €263m) lying in the coffers of the Reserve Bank of India.

In the incident, poisonous gas leaked from the factory, killing thousands and injuring about half a million people. Their injuries ranged from breathlessness and gastrointestinal problems to neurological disorders. The official death toll is 5800, but campaigners say that more than 20 000 people have died from gas related illnesses.

In 1989, the Union Carbide Corporation paid \$470m as full and final compensation to the Indian government for disbursement to the people affected. Although the individual compensation claims (from just over a million claimants)—which have still not all been settled—have dragged on in Bhopal's lower courts for two decades, the undistributed money held in US dollars since 1989 has continued to earn interest, compounded by the growth of the dollar in relation to the rupee.

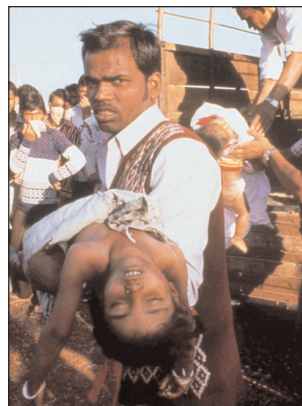
Victims' organisations point out that although \$470m was paid by Union Carbide for

102 000 injured people and 3000 deaths as part of the settlement, in fact far more claims have been made than this. Although officially only 5800 compensation claims for death have been paid out, more than 9000 further death claims have been paid out, but under the injuries category. The total number of successful claims for injuries, including these deaths, amounts to more than 550 000.

The Bhopal Gas Tragedy Relief and Rehabilitation Department said that by the end of October 2003 judgment had been made on more than a million claims, with compensation being awarded to 554 895 people for injury and 15 310 claims for deaths.

"Almost half a million victims have been paid a paltry amount of 25 000 rupees by the Indian courts, while for deaths a shameful amount of 100 000 rupees has been paid on average," said N D Jayaprakash, co-convenor of Bhopal Gas Peedit Sangharsh Sahayog Samiti, a victim support organisation.

More than 4000 victims still visit health facilities every day for treatment of gas related ailments 20 years after the event. □



Victims of the 1984 disaster